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ABSTRACT

Designed to provide specific, practical help for educators in starting or improving school public relations programs, this guide tells how to make each school building the focal point in informing the public about programs and activities, building confidence in what schools are doing, developing an awareness of the importance of education, and improving the partnership between parents and teachers. The guide is intended to help (1) integrate the home, school, and community in efforts to improve schools and (2) interpret the aims and objectives of the schools to the community. Stressed in the guide is the imporance of planning good communications by researching what the community knows and wants to know about the schools. Administrators are advised that good manners and good first impressions are essential elements of day-to-day public relations. Frequent positive communciation with staff, students, and parents is a must. All members of the school staff should be involved in the communications effort. Evaluations and a diary should be used to continuously improve a school-community relations program. The appendices contain a school district performance rating scale to be completed by parents; types of news releases and their intended audiences; and an example of a news release. (Author/MLF)

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

BASIC SCHOOL PR GUIDE

Building-Level PR Programs

One in a series of eight school public relations guides which contain concise, tested and practical ideas.

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National School Public Relations Association

EA 015 219

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Introduction

NSPRA's **Basic School PR Kit**, of which this guide is a part, is designed to provide specific, practical help for educators in starting or improving school PR programs. The Kit has been developed in response to the hundreds of requests for help NSPRA receives each year. Material on vital public relations topics is presented in the most concise, usable format possible.

The basic concept of public relations is explained on cassette tape by Edward L. Bernays, the man who pioneered the field of public relations in the 1920s. Important school PR topics are covered in detail in eight tightly-written guides. Additional materials are included in a resource packet containing public relations standards, proven ideas that work, and a PR planning guide and worksheet.

Altogether, the **Basic School PR Kit** is a short course in school PR fundamentals, a refresher for existing programs, a ready reference for dealing with problems that arise and a resource for anyone working to build public confidence in education.

This guide, *Building-Level PR Programs*, tells you how to make each school building the focal point in informing the public about your programs and activities, building confidence in what schools are doing, developing an awareness of the importance of education, and improving the partnership between parents and teachers. This guide can help integrate the home, school and community in efforts to improve schools; and interpret the aims and objectives of the schools to the community.

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Chapter 1
Need For Effective Building-Level Public Relations

"Public relations?"

"I haven't got time for that."

"Communicate?"

"We're doing a good job. The kids are learning. Their parents know it. That's what counts."

That attitude may have worked in 1969 when Gallup first began to survey Americans' attitudes about education. Of those polled, 51 percent were parents of school-age children and 44 percent had children in public schools.

But in the 1979 Gallup poll, 32 percent of those interviewed were parents of school-age children and only 28 percent were parents of public school students. According to Census Bureau figures this trend will continue, making it essential that educators redouble their efforts to communicate with the entire community, with non-parents as well as parents.

Now more than ever before it is the responsibility of the local school to take the lead in this communication effort. Despite declining enrollment and the general maturing of the population, the schools continue to be centers of community action and interest.

According to Ned S. Hubbell, "the school that takes this role seriously finds itself in an area of greatest support when school budgets and bond levies are on the ballot." Hubbell is the founder of the nation's first counseling firm devoted to educational public relations and opinion research.

Consequently, it is up to the local school to:

1. Inform the public about its programs and activities.
2. Build confidence in what it is doing for students.
3. Rally support for the total education program.
4. Develop an awareness of the importance of public education in a democracy.
5. Improve the partnership between parents and teachers in meeting the educational needs of students.

6. Integrate the home, school and community in improving the educational opportunities for all.
7. Evaluate the offerings of schools and the needs of children in the community.
8. Interpret the aims and objectives of schools.[1]

Who Is Responsible?

The community considers each and every member of the school family (principal, teachers, support staff, students, volunteers) to be an expert about the school and its programs. Each will carry a message from the school to the community. The kind of message that is carried will depend on the principal.

If the principal keeps staff, students, parents and community leaders informed and involved, the message they carry will be accurate and positive. If the principal fails to do this, the message carried could be incorrect and damaging, not only to the school or program, but to the district as well.

According to Mary Lindskog, director of publications, Robbinsdale Area Schools, Minneapolis, Minn., the principal, as the leader, must:

1. Know the school community well.
2. Train the staff in their PR roles. This means every member of the school staff — secretary, teacher, aide, bus driver, cook and custodian.
3. Keep the students at the focal point of the school-community relations program.
4. Plan for the involvement and education of parents.
5. Be aware of the best way to use the media to keep the public informed about what's happening in the schools.

Remember that educational public relations is a planned and systematic management function designed to help improve the programs and services of an educational organization. It relies on a comprehensive two-way communications process involving both internal and external publics, with a goal of stimulating a better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments and needs of the organization. Educational public relations assists in interpreting public attitudes, identifies and helps shape policies and procedures in the public interest, and carries on involvement and informational activities which earn public understanding and acceptance.[2]

As the leader in this effort, the principal creates a positive

image of schools. He or she keeps the community informed about the school through the media, through personal contacts and through the involvement of the community in school activities.

Planning is the first step in this process.

Chapter 2
Planning A Building-Level Communications Program

Thomas Rhone, a high school principal in Kansas City, Kan., Public Schools has found that public relations is not simply a newsletter which is sent out after all the other work is done. Rather, he says, a public relations program includes many activities directed to, and received from, a school's many publics: students, former students, parents and relatives, staff members, news media, and members of the attendance area and community.

Public relations activities, however, don't just happen. They must be planned. But, before the planning can begin, you need to know your community and what they know and think about schools.

Assessing Your Needs

William J. Banach, administrative assistant, Macomb (Mich.) Intermediate School District, believes the school publics should be thought of as customers and that the job of a school public relations program is to "market the school program so that it is positioned positively in people's minds."

To do this Banach suggests following these steps:

1. Identify your consumers/publics and list them.

2. Determine which of your publics are most important to you. Not all publics are important to schools. You have to identify your priority publics. These may change with the issues.
3. Determine what you know about your priority publics. Do you know their average age? . . . the things they like and dislike about schools? . . . what they know about you?
4. Know which of your programs, personnel or other information about schools interests your priority publics. Schools have numerous products but there is no need to advertise all of them to everyone. Educators have to match products with consumers. What does your staff care about? What do you have for your students? What about parents? What are you selling them?
5. Determine what your key publics think about your products. You must know what people think about your school and what it does if your marketing communication is to be successful.
6. Know how your priority consumers learn about your products. What are your school's channels of communication? How are people finding out about you?
7. Know what you want your priority publics to know and think about your products.
8. Identify barriers that prevent you from getting your priority publics to think about your products the way you want them to. The first thing to do is make a list of the barriers you perceive. Then ask yourself if these things are really barriers. If not, then there is no problem. If yes, determine what you can do to eliminate the barrier or work around it.
9. Write a slogan for your school (in ten words or less). Every school needs a theme to focus on.
10. Communicate about your school and products so your priority publics will value them and believe your slogan.

Deciding What Your Publics Need To Know

The principal is the key person, the "catalyst," responsible for coordination of the total public relations program. But that person cannot do the job alone.

To get started, consider forming a communications committee. Members should include a parent, teacher, support staff member (aide, bus driver, cook, custodian, or secretary), a student and, if possible, a business and/or non-parent representative.

The first task is to identify the various publics, in your building and in the community which you most want to reach. Discuss ways you can find out the following:

- What each public knows about schools
- What each public wants to know about schools
- What services would they like the school to provide for the students or for them.

The staff from one elementary school canvassed its attendance area to find out what people knew about the school. In one afternoon, staff members knocked on every fifth door asking the resident if he or she knew where the school was, who they knew at the school, and what they knew about the programs and services.

Many schools use parent report cards (see Appendix A) to find out how parents rate school programs.

A brief questionnaire at a school program or activity plus periodic questions in newsletters provide helpful feedback information.

Bonnie Ellison, public information director, Northside School District, San Antonio, Texas, recommends trying a variety of gimmicks to get a greater response to school surveys.

For a visitation or tour day at your school try Ellison's idea of using a short survey form as a meal ticket. Guests turn in the completed form in exchange for lunch.

For a longer survey, add some questions that are humorous. Ellison has discovered people will complete anything that is fun; read anything that is humorous.

She also finds that making people feel their form is important — special — not just one among millions, produces a higher return. The headline "Some of the Best Families are Federally Connected" resulted in a much greater return of the impact aid survey her district needed than past surveys with cover letters explaining the purpose.

Another less formal way to find out what your community is thinking is to identify **key communicators** — people who are opinion leaders in your school area. Bring these people together for lunch and an informal discussion of schools. Then ask them to call you whenever they need answers to questions about a school activity or issue. Let them know you will call them when something occurs they should know about. Key communicators are extremely helpful and effective in spreading correct information about schools. (See page 20 for ways to develop a key communicator program).

Planning Your Program

Once you have learned what all your publics know or want to know about your school, you are ready to plan your program.

Call a **school family meeting** of everyone who works in the school — professional and support staff members. Use a workshop process designed to involve everyone.

The timetable on the opposite page for yearly planning was developed by John Wherry, executive director of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). It is based on a July-to-July schedule but can easily be adapted.

You will want to build on your communication program each year, continuing those activities which are highly evaluated and discontinuing those that did not produce desired results. You will want to review the school's priority publics, both internal and external, and make certain that you are reaching them. This may call for a different target emphasis in subsequent years. This steady, ongoing process will build higher staff morale and increase community support far more than a series of short bursts of communication activity scheduled around a major public relations effort.

The list of activities you can use to improve your school's and education's image is limited only by your imagination. The next section will help you get started.

Chapter 3
How To Do It

Building an effective school-community communications program is a step by step process. It will **not** happen instantly, but each positive step you take in building better rapport with students, staff, parents and the community will pay dividends.

Here are just a few good ideas from school districts around the country that will help you get started. Your final program must be

A TIMETABLE FOR YOUR PR PROGRAM

July	• Modify and/or formulate goals and objectives of the PR program for the coming year.
August/ September	• Review the needs of the various publics served by your schools — both internal and external publics. How are they presently involved in your communication program? • Develop specific plans for major PR activities to be carried out; clearly specify "who will do what — when."
September/ June	• Plan communications activities for your priority publics. A realistic goal is to carry out one major PR activity each month during the school year in addition to ongoing communication efforts such as a school building newsletter. • Develop a community calendar that can be used by parents, staff and the community to keep school activities a part of their regular schedule.
May/June	• During the last days of the school year hold a school family meeting to review the year's PR activities and discuss the evaluations of each. Identify weak areas. Specify those activities that should be continued and those to be dropped.
July	• Re-evaluate the activities of the past year, modify and/or formulate goals and objectives for the PR program for the coming year.

your own. The ideas you will include in it are limited only by your and your staff's imagination, ingenuity and the needs of your community.

Making A Good First Impression

The next time you go to your school pretend to be a stranger looking at it for the first time.

- As you approach the building, look to see if there is a sign which clearly identifies the building by name and by district.
- Notice the grounds. Are they well kept? Is litter picked up or is it allowed to blow unnoticed around the area?

> Menlo Park Elementary School in suburban Portland, Ore., organized the student body as a chapter of a state organization to stop litter and vandalism as a way to build student pride in keeping the building and grounds well maintained.

- Are broken windows repaired immediately, or has the custodian gotten into the habit of covering them until someone can repair them some day?
- What about the sign on the door? Does it say welcome, or does it warn visitors to report to the office or face prosecution for trespassing?
- Is there a map by every entrance which clearly shows the way to the office. (A simple diagram of the building, a copy machine, some colored pens and access to lamination are all that is needed to make such signs).
- Is the custodian friendly to visitors he/she sees, or does that person growl, "What do you want?"
- Once your visitor arrives at the office, how does the school secretary or other members of the office staff respond? Have you established a policy which says the visitor, like the customer, is "king" and should receive immediate attention?
- What information do you have available to help a visitor? Do you have a one-page description of your school with a map on the back to help the person find his or her way around?

- If this is just one stop, do you have a district map to show him/her how to get to other buildings?
- If this is a new parent, do you have a packet of information ready to welcome him/her to the school and the community? This information should include a district map, something about the district's educational program and special services, a directory of who's who and how to call them, enrollment and attendance information and your own building handbook.
- If this is a new student, is there a well-established procedure of orientation and welcome to make sure the first day is a happy one?
- Listen to how the telephone is answered. Is the person answering the phone with a pleasant tone of voice? Does the person answering the phone identify the school and indicate by tone of voice he/she is ready to help the caller?

First impressions are lasting ones, often hard to change. Be sure the first contact a person has with your school or program is positive.

Getting The Staff Involved

The chief administrator of a district, school or program is the leader in community-school relations. But, to be successful, this person must have the full cooperation and commitment of the staff.

Staff must be thought of as the school family, with the cook and custodian playing as important a role as the teachers.

Start by renaming the **teachers lounge** the **staff lounge** and let non-teaching staff know they are welcome there.

Whenever anything happens, be sure your staff is the first to know. Employees are your school's most valuable PR asset. If they know and understand what's going on, they will be able to communicate accurately and positively with parents, neighbors and friends.

Get to know your staff. No matter how large a staff you have you should know everyone by name. Learn something personal about them. Remember birthdays, remember to ask about a family member who is ill, or how a son or daughter is doing in a special sport or activity. It's attention like this that lets your staff know you care about them as people.

Involve them in the decision making in the school. This lets them know you are working together as a team.

MEETINGS

Include teaching and support staff in staff (school family) meetings. Scheduling meetings when all staff can be present is sometimes hard to do, but it is worth the effort in improved morale, even if support staff can include only the head secretary, head custodian and head cook.

In Minneapolis, Minn., one principal solved the school family staff meeting problem by holding the meetings Friday mornings before school. He serves continental breakfast. Anyone can put an item on the agenda. The focus is on current problems in the school. Often special people from the central office are invited to talk.

The same principal has monthly family meetings which include everyone who works for the school as a paid staff person, or as a volunteer. This is the time when all the birthdays of the month are celebrated. Various individuals take responsibility for refreshments.

From time to time, this Minnesota principal calls a meeting of the "Big Three" in his building — the secretary, the head custodian and himself. This recognizes the importance of keeping these key people on top of things.

One word of caution — never hold a meeting with the entire staff if the information can be given in some other way. Use the public address system, use the grapevine, write a memo, or post notices in a specially designated space on the staff bulletin board. When you do hold a meeting, start on time and end on time. Being considerate of your staff's time is just one more way to let them know you consider their job and its demands important.

PUT IT IN WRITING

- **A daily bulletin** is a good way to keep the staff appraised of what's happening.
- **Issue a monthly calendar** to which all school family members contribute. The calendar should list all activities and special events taking place in the school. This enables staff members to plan ahead.
- **Write "pat on the back" notes** or thank yous to staff members frequently.
- **Make sure your door is often open** during the day and that you have time to listen to staff members, their problems and their ideas.

- **Have coffee with the cooks and custodians** at least once a week. Have lunch with the staff as often as you can.

- **Be a regular visitor in classrooms.** Offer to take a lesson for a teacher, teach a special class, or read a story to students on occasion.

- **Don't wait until evaluation time** to let staff members know how they are doing. Individual conferences on an every-term basis, frequent visits to classrooms or work stations, grade level or department meetings are ways to keep the staff informed about how they are doing. Instant feedback after a parent-teacher-administrator conference is helpful too.

There's one more member of the staff to consider — the **substitute teacher.** A district-wide or building orientation for substitutes at the beginning of the year is extremely helpful if it can be arranged. In addition, or in lieu of, develop a special pamphlet or information sheet for substitutes that lets them know what to do, step by step during the day.

Inside the front cover of the regular teacher's lesson plan book, attach a one-page information sheet and building map with the restrooms and staff lounge clearly marked.

Working With Students

Students are a priority public in any school PR program. They are the ones who most consistently carry messages about school home to parents, family, friends and neighbors. How a student feels about school, teachers and the classroom reflects his/her attitude, and in turn the family's attitude about your school or program.

"WHAT DID YOU DO AT SCHOOL TODAY?"

A child needs to be reminded of "what he learned today." This can be summarized by the teacher during the last five minutes of the day. It helps assure that when Johnny goes home, he will be able to respond to the question "What did you do at school today?" with a much better answer than "Nothing!"

Finally, according to Harold Lewis, in "The Principal's Role in School Community Relations,"[3] "the principal should see that the students are being educated about their public schools. If students are educated about America's public education system in school, then upon becoming members of the community, their comprehension of school problems and programs will be vastly improved, and consequently so will school-community relations.

Communicating With Parents

Getting to know your parents is just as important to good school community relations as getting to know your students and involving staff in the communication effort.

The parent represents the basic point of contact with the community. A parent's natural interest provides an opportunity to build favorable understanding and support of schools.

Parents' attitudes toward schools are based on their own experiences as students, their children's experiences, and their experiences as parents when they have contact with the schools. Your job is to be sure the experiences parents have with your school or program are as positive as possible. Their feelings and concerns are important.

- **The school newsletter,** published on a regular basis of no less than once a month, provides important information for parents and is well read especially when the menu for the coming week is included.
- **Teachers phone parents** in many schools across the country, before the end of the first few weeks of school to introduce themselves and to encourage parents to contact them whenever they have questions.
- **A welcoming note** is sent by the principal of an elementary school in Minneapolis, Minn., to parents whenever a new family moves into the district. In another elementary school the principal **visits the family** by the end of the first week the children are in school.

Getting students and parents off to a good start in school involves getting them acquainted with the school. Orientation for

parents and pre-school students in the spring when they register for school, or in the fall before school starts, welcomes them into the school family and produces positive results.

- The elementary schools in the Winston-Dillard District in Dillard, Ore., which do not have kindergarten programs send packets of materials to preschool parents monthly to help them work with their children to get them ready for first grade.
- Orientation programs for incoming students at junior high and high schools are just as important. Plan special programs to let students and parents visit the new school, meet counselors and administrators, and find out what the new facility is like and what will be expected of them.
- Floyd Light Middle School in suburban Portland, Ore., uses a slide presentation narrated by a student to introduce sixth graders and their parents to their new middle school. The slide presentation is kept in the counseling office so that it is available for any new parent or student to see when they first come to school.
- At the same middle school, each new student is assigned a buddy for his/her first day. This buddy takes the new student to all classes and makes sure he/she learns the rules and procedures.
- Milwaukie, Ore. High School has a spring activity fair to introduce incoming students and parents to the many extracurricular activities the school offers and to be sure new students have the opportunity to sign-up for the activities of their choice.

An open house which features opportunities to meet teachers and see what students are doing in school is a popular way to get parents to school, but it often takes some ingenuity to get a good turnout.

- At David Douglas High School in suburban Portland, Ore., teachers called parents of students in their home rooms to invite them to Back-to-School Night. This effort resulted in one of the best turnouts the school ever had for an open house.
- Personal invitations written by students or teachers are another good method for improving attendance at open house programs.
- One Vancouver, Wash., elementary school teacher had each of her students make life-size paper dolls of themselves. The parents easily found their children and this added extra incentive to come to school for open house.

- A Minneapolis, Minn., elementary school dismisses school early on the day of open house and has students and parents return in the evening to participate together in regular classes.
- Invite parents or grandparents to spend the day in school with their child, or have their children invite them for lunch.
- One second grade teacher at West Powellhurst Elementary School in the David Douglas School District gets 100 percent turnout of parents, grandparents or neighbors when she has an annual **Mother's Day Tea.** She has the students bake cookies for the occasion, video tapes them while they are doing it, and then shows the film. The students serve the cookies for the tea. As a Mother's Day present, she has the students recite their favorite recipe, she writes the recipes, and publishes them in a book for each child to give his/her mother, grandmother or neighbor.

Make your building a center for family fun. Plan evening activities for mother/daughter, father/son, mother/son, father/daughter, special family entertainment (e.g., a variety show) or have a pot luck dinner. Be certain to keep in mind the needs of the growing numbers of single parent families as you plan activities.

PARENT VOLUNTEERS

Parent volunteers provide an important service to the school, but they need tender loving care to keep them going. Make sure their tasks are well defined when they arrive. Be sure to have a place for them to hang their coats and stash their purses. If they are to be classroom tutors, provide special training sessions for them and the teachers they will work with.

Recognize their efforts in some special way at the end of the school year. An assembly with awards, a luncheon with certificates, a bouquet of flowers and a thank you note are good ways to show your appreciation. Don't forget a news release to the media.

Invite parents to share their special talents at Career Days, on advisory committees or in other special projects at the school.

SCHOOL COMMITTEES

Many schools have local school committees which are comprised of parents and some non-parents. Make sure these committees play an active role in school affairs. Clearly define their role. In this capacity have them review the building budget, the curriculum, and help plan the school communications program.

Let them know what happens to any recommendations they give. Include these people when you are recognizing volunteers.

COFFEE KLATSCHES

Coffees in parents' homes or at the school are good times to discuss any problem related to school.

> At Lincoln Park Elementary School in the David Douglas School District the principal who recently received his Ph.D. advertised in the school newsletter that "he is a doctor who makes house calls and asks parents to invite him to visit with their family or several families in the neighborhood."

Suburban Portland, Ore., Gilbert Middle School principal has a monthly coffee and conversation which is always well attended, even by parents whose children have gone on to high school. The parents decide at each session what the next one will be about. They can discuss any subject and ask for any resource person. The only rule is that they cannot discuss a person unless that person is present.

PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES

Parent teacher conferences are one of the most important ways teachers communicate with parents. Planning for these conferences is essential.

Successful parent-teacher conferences don't just happen, but depend on the careful planning by both the teacher and parent. In-service training programs for teachers will help them improve their skills in working with parents — listening, using language parents can understand (no jargon), interpreting the school and curriculum and discussing the student's strengths and weaknesses. Many schools provide parents with an information sheet or booklet to let them know what to expect at the parent-teacher conference along with suggestions of things they might do to prepare for it.

- Conference times should be arranged for the parents' convenience. If a school has a large number of working parents, have conferences begin at noon and continue into the evening or offer sessions on Saturday.

- If a parent is unable to attend a conference, make sure that parent is contacted by phone to set up another appointment or to relay conference information.
- Don't stop conferences when students leave elementary school. In junior high and high school it takes more ingenuity to hold parent conferences, but it is well worth the effort.

CHECK LIST FOR PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

1. Make a list of things that will help the teacher understand your child better. For example:
   - any special health needs or problems
   - outside interests and hobbies
   - feelings about school
   - relationship with brothers and/or sisters
2. Make a list of things you want to find out from the teacher. For example, you may wish to know about:
   - services and programs the school offers
   - discipline policies
   - grading policy
   - extra curricular activities
   - daily schedule
   - homework policy
   - health and safety programs

From "A Parent-Teacher Conference" Guide, NSPRA, 1801 N. Moore Street, Arlington, Va. 22209.

Once a line of two-way communication with parents has been established at conference time, do your best to maintain it throughout the school year.

ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

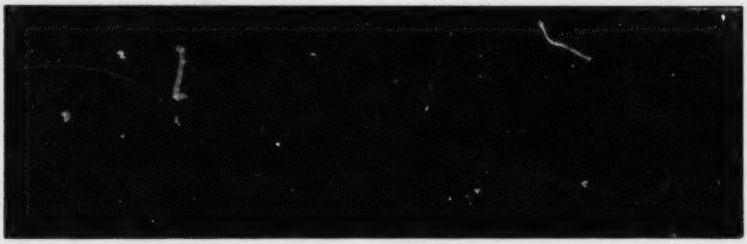
Get a polaroid camera and use it regularly to take pictures of students who receive special recognition. When you've finished posting the pictures on the school bulletin board, send them home to parents with a note. Follow the same pattern for clippings from the newspaper when one of your students is featured.

Success cards, "Happy Grams," "Warm Smiles," and quick

notes often written on preprinted forms should be sent to parents by teachers and principals whenever a student does something well.

Progress reports, sent most often by high schools and junior highs when a student is failing, should be sent just as frequently when students are doing well.

Special awards or certificates for honor roll are positive reinforcement for students. But a letter of congratulations to parents lets them know they are doing a good job supporting their child's good study habits.



Letting The Community Know

The school is a part of the larger community. In most communities, however, the local school is a center of community activity.

In those areas where more and more of the population have no children in school, the school has an even greater responsibility to offer these people some services so that when budget time comes around they will have reason to support the levy request.

- **The school newsletter** can be a vehicle for communication with the larger community. Include churches and businesses in your area on the mailing list. Ask parents of students who graduate from your school if they would like to continue to receive school news, and then mail it to them. If you get a mailing list of over 200 you can use the school district's bulk mailing permit at a cost of less than 5-cents per letter.
- **Arrange to have exhibits of student work in businesses** in the community. At holiday time, businesses are often happy to have students help in decorating their establishments.
- **Use your local businesses** for more than sources of ad revenue for school publications and sports programs. Ask business representatives to participate in career days. Involve them on advisory committees. Ask them to share their expertise at inservice sessions with staff.

KEY COMMUNICATORS

Key communicators are opinion leaders in your community that can help you spread the good word about schools. They can provide instant feedback on school issues and access to the local community grapevine.

A KEY COMMUNICATORS PROGRAM

1. Ask the staff and members of your parent group to identify those people in the school area who regularly talk to large numbers of people. These people could be barbers, beauticians, clergy, realtors, merchants, gas station operators, school crossing guards, postal employees, key students, key staff members.
2. After the list is made, the principal should send a letter to each person telling them they have been selected to serve as key communicators and explain the nature of the organization.
3. Those who accept are asked to attend informal small group meetings of about seven key communicators.
4. These meetings are designed to build confidence between the principal and the key communicators. The communicators must see the principal as a person who cares about young people, understands the problems that exist, and wants to find ways to improve the school program.
5. Ask key communicators to call you when they hear a rumor, good or bad, and tell them they will immediately be apprised of information about the schools.
6. Help key communicators develop a solid rapport with the school staff so they in turn can help the community gain confidence in their schools.
7. Send a steady flow of information to key communicators. You should also call them periodically to ask what they are hearing and any suggestions they may have.

VANDAL ALERT

Ask school neighbors to become involved in a campaign against vandalism. A district citizens advisory committee in the David Douglas District had stickers with emergency numbers printed on them and then asked the principal in each building to take the stickers and a letter of explanation to all of the houses within view of the school.

Neighbors were asked to report any suspicious activity to one of the emergency numbers. As a result, one neighbor saw and reported a fire at one of the elementary schools which, unnoticed, might have destroyed the school. Another school neighbor reported teenagers driving their car on the school playing field and reported it quickly enough to reduce damage to the field and result in the teenagers' apprehension.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Senior citizens are a special group that need to be involved with schools. Many senior citizens would welcome an opportunity to volunteer in the schools. They can supply warmth and encouragement, especially to youngsters who have no grandparents. Many enjoy attending school activities.

District or school efforts to include senior citizens can build a pro-school spirit and outlook in older residents, especially if they were once parents in your district.

- **Gold cards** furnished by the school district can be used by retired citizens for admission to school activities free of charge. The Springfield, Ore., school district arranges with neighboring districts to have cards honored at athletic contests in those districts where Springfield teams participate.
- While senior citizens bring a great deal to schools as volunteers, many of them need to supplement their incomes. Consider hiring someone over sixty-five when you have an aide position to fill.
- Grandparent Days are popular events for getting older people back into the school. Encourage students to bring an older neighbor as a foster grandparent if their own grandparents live too far away to come.
- Invite senior citizens to be guest lecturers and to be involved in some special performances or demonstrations in the school.
- In a school district with declining enrollment, it may be possible to find a vacant room and a parent group willing to fix it up

as a **Senior Citizen Drop-In Center.** A comfortable place for this age group to gather can be a spring board for getting them involved in the school and its activities.

- The secondary school in Harbor Springs, Mich., is a Senior Citizens' Center as well. As part of its Community School program, the school turned its library into a center. The senior citizens have use of all school facilities, from the auditorium to the cafeteria. If they wish to mingle with the students, they may serve as tutors, teacher aids, guest lecturers or take classes.
- School lunch and breakfast programs can be extended to offer senior citizens the opportunity to eat at school for the adult lunch price. As a courtesy, offer reduced price lunches for senior citizens once a week.

REACH OUT

Encourage staff members to join and be active in the community.

Meet with clergy at least once a year to discuss school services and activities they will be interested in knowing about. Send them your school newsletter.

Keep schools open in the evening and encourage community groups to use the facilities. If your district has a community school program, be sure your building participates in it.

THE NEWS MEDIA

One of the primary sources of information about schools is the news media. For people who do not have children in school it is often the primary source of news about school.

There are so many good stories in your school that they should be reported to help create a positive image of the job schools are doing. Pilot programs, class projects, field trips and school policies are examples of school news worth reporting. Cass S. Franks, administrative assistant, school-community relations, Utica (Mich.) Community Schools, and William J. Banach, Mt. Clemens, Mich., have developed a list of story ideas which will help you get started. (See Appendix B)

Don't limit your news to the big news and hot issues. Frequent "tips" to the district public information officer or to the media can stimulate interest in feature stories. (See Appendix C, for a sample "Tip Sheet" from the Vancouver, Wash., School District.) Anticipate

holidays and "slow" news times when newspapers and television are hungry for something to fill air space and air time.

George Pawles, principal in the Rocky River, Ohio, School District finds that reporters will use school stories that are written to be read. They should include the complete facts, the unusual and the new, and be sent in advance (before an event happens). The 5 W's — who, what, when, where, why and how are always essential.

Stories should be written in the third person using short sentences.

Be sure to include all of the important details like first and last names of all people involved. Include students' ages and grades.

Get the staff involved in writing stories. Include staff stories in the weekly tip sheet you send to the district public information officer or to the media.

In the Boise, Idaho, schools teachers and principals send their story ideas to the district public information officer on preprinted tip sheets titled "Hot Flashes."

NEWSLETTERS

A school building newsletter published on a regular basis is an important link between schools and the school community. It should be written in a short, easy to read format.

1. An 8½ x 11 sheet printed on both sides, preferably in two columns, is sufficient for most school newsletters.
2. Give your newsletter a name; use the school slogan in the title if possible.
3. Be sure each issue is identified with the school or department name, address and school district. The editor's or principal's name and a phone number should also be published in each issue.
4. Keep to a regular publication schedule and be sure items are timely. Parents and your other publics should know when to expect it and be able to rely on it for news of upcoming events.

5. Keep the copy simple and direct. Anyone who picks it up should be able to read it and enjoy it whether they are connected with a school or not.
6. People like to read about people. Use lots of names, first and last, spelled correctly and identified by age and grade, if a student; by position, if a staff member; by role, if a parent.
7. Make sure information is accurate. Double check every fact, name, date and spelling.
8. Accentuate the positive things that are going on in your school. Parents and your other publics want to know how the students are doing, what's taught and how, special services and policies, and how their money is spent.
9. By including a lunch menu you increase the readership of your newsletter.
10. Remember people will read items that are humorous.
11. Invite teachers, parents, the secretary, the bus driver and other staff members to submit articles.
12. If you are typing your newsletter use generous margins, up to one inch. Type stories single spaced with a double space between paragraphs. Triple space between one story and the headline of the next.
13. Don't hand-letter headlines. Use transfer type letters that are available in art supply stores. If you use artwork make sure the line drawings are simple and clear.
14. Send your newsletter to all district administrators, the school board, churches and businesses in your attendance area. Be sure each staff member receives a copy.
15. Keep one copy of each newsletter in sequential order in a notebook. You will find that news you want to tell your parents this year is often nearly the same as last year. Revising the old article will save you time in writing your newsletter copy.

THE SCHOOL HANDBOOK

Every school and department should have its rules, regulations and procedures written and printed in a handbook, in a format that is easily understandable for students and parents.

The handbook should also include information about district services and school activities. Attention should be paid to making sure the contents conform with district policies and procedures.

THE TELEPHONE

The telephone is often a person's first contact with a school. Consequently, it can be one of the most effective instruments of community communication. Don't take it for granted!

Here are some ways of using the telephone to close the communication gap recommended by School District 66, Omaha, Neb.:

- Call those parents who don't get involved in school activities to visit with them about school.
- Call new parents to invite them to visit school. Call after a few weeks to see how things are going.
- Ask teachers to call one home per week in your community. Invite parents and non-parents to visit the school and ask them how they feel the schools are doing. Here is an opportunity to answer concerns that residents have about schools and education in general.
- Call the parents of a student who has just had a bad report card or a drop in interest in a particular subject. Give parents hints on how they might help the student improve.
- Call to congratulate on a child's improved performance or to report a good deed that the child has done.
- Teachers may want to call parents to personalize an invitation to an open house. "I hope you'll be able to make it. Joe has done some art work that I think is great and it will be on display."
- Call to clear up misunderstandings.
- Call people in the community to ask their opinions. Nothing is more flattering to a person than to know that his opinions are valued.
- Have upper grade students call people in the community (non-parents) to invite them to open house or activity night.
- Follow up invitations and assignments with phone calls.
- Call parents of children who are ill to inquire how the student is feeling.
- Use the telephone to contact people who may not be available at regular times during the day or evening.
- Use the telephone to do some active listening.

Chapter 4
Evaluating Your Efforts

"Operating a community relations program without evaluation is like exploring uncharted territories and not bothering to map them. You put serious limitations on the value of your discoveries and you stand a good chance of getting lost."[4]

If your program is successful, you will want to know what made it work and apply those successful factors to future programs.

Evaluation will also help you see what program activities were superfluous, what went wrong, and what happened that was unexpected and how you handled it.

Deciding what worked well, what didn't, and why is the basis for moving from one step to the next in your quest for good school-community relations.

Evaluation helps you apply your successes to future programs and avoid costly errors.

Evaluation need not be formal; however, some form of evaluation should be applied to every activity you undertake.

Feedback And Surveys

Feedback is one form of information evaluation in a two-way communication program. This is the information you receive from key communicators, parent groups, from monitoring the kind of phone calls and mail the school receives, from coffee klatsches, from open ended questions in the newsletter.

Feedback can also come in more formal evaluations. Use a brief questionnaire at a program or at parent conferences, or at some other special activity you hold during the school year.

Surveying can be done by mail, by telephone, or by personal interview. Professional surveying is expensive but the most reliable. However, you can conduct your own surveys with sufficient accuracy for your needs. (See the guide in this **Basic School PR Kit** on *Survey and Feedback.)*

Be sure whenever you conduct a survey to report the results. Use the news media as well as your building newsletter. Be sure to discuss the results and their implications with your staff. Keep the results in an easy to use format so they will be readily available for planning future activities.

Use Exit Interviews

When a family or an employee leaves your school or district use this as an opportunity to find out what they thought about their experiences with you.

The Topeka, Kan., School District uses a self-addressed return form to survey families when they move. The form is a part of the local schools' **check-out procedure.**

Parents are asked how they feel about the education their child received in the Topeka Schools: were they well informed, were they made to feel welcome, and why were they leaving the district?

Similar questions can be asked of employees. Give them an opportunity to offer suggestions that could improve the working situation.

The Scrap Book

Every school or department should have a scrap book. The collection of printed memorabilia serves as the permanent history of the school or department. It also can be one measure of the effectiveness of your communications program.

The scrap book should include the following:

1. Clippings from newspapers or magazines with the publication name, date and any other pertinent information.
2. Pictures of all school classes and staff members.
3. Special student achievements.
4. Lists of names of parent groups and advisory committee officers.

Keep A Diary

As soon as you and your staff plan your public relations program for the school year, start a diary or log to keep track of your progress in meeting your goal.

A log or diary helps keep you in control. A record of what has been done helps you move to the next step without wasteful duplication. It should also tell you who has been assigned which tasks. Keeping a record can help remind you when it's time to publicize. It also makes it easier to keep on target in meeting your planned objectives.

At the end of the year, your diary is handy to help you review the year and plan for the next. It is also an essential tool in helping you achieve continuity for your program.

Chapter 5
Summary of Key Points

Good communications is essential to building community support for schools. The major link in this effort is the **local school.**

The building communications program is much more than a newsletter or an occasional story in the newspaper.

It must be planned. It must have continuity from year to year. It must involve each and every member of the school staff.

Each member of the school staff is a communicator. All staff members must have accurate information, and must feel involved in the decision-making process in order to carry a positive image of your school to the community.

Researching what your community knows about your school and wants to know about your school is the first step.

Planning a year-round campaign, using your research, is the next step Don't try to communicate with everybody at once. **Pick several priority groups for each year.**

Each of your publics — staff, students, parents, businesses, senior citizens, clergy, other community groups — has its special needs. Plan your communication with these needs in mind.

Good manners and good first impressions are essential elements of day-to-day public relations.

Frequent positive communication with staff, students and parents is a must. Recognize these people whenever they do something well.

Make your school a community center for key communicators, volunteers, and advisory committees — family activities, special evening programs or classes will bring in others. Involve people in working with you for better schools.

Newsletters, handbooks, the telephone and the news media help you get the school story out to the community. Coffee klatsches, parent conferences and other community meetings are good places **to listen to how well you are telling that story.**

This booklet provides just a few good ideas for getting your public relations program started. Your final program must be your own. The list of activities you can use to improve your school and education is limited only by your imagination.

The proof of your program will be in the evaluation you do. Evaluate every activity. Keep a diary of what you do. Use the evaluations and diary to continuously improve your school-community relations program.

Footnotes

1. List adapted from Stephen J. Knesevich, *Administration of Public Education* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 475.
2. "Standards for Educational Public Relations Programs," Adopted by the National School Public Relations Association, 1801 N. Moore St., Arlington, Virginia 22209. The NSPRA *Basic School PR Kit.*
3. Harold Lewis, *"The Principals Role in School-Community Relations,"* submitted in partial fulfillment of EDAE-5007 School Community Relations, U.P.I. & S.U. Dulles, Virginia, February 28, 1974.
4. *Lesly's Public Relations Handbook*, ed. Philip Lesly, Second Edition, Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1978, pp. 77-78.

APPENDIX A

HOW WOULD YOU RATE DISTRICT 66 SCHOOLS PERFORMANCE IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS?

	Excellent	Good	Average	Unsatisfactory	No Opinion
CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION					
Curriculum in relation to your child's individual needs					
Learning materials in relation to your child's needs					
Instructional staff in meeting your child's needs					
Instructional methods in meeting your child's needs					
The manner in which your child's school is organized					
Number of students in your child's class (pupil-teacher ratio)					
PROGRESS REPORTS					
Your school's reporting system					
Parent-Teacher Conferences					
GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING					
Your school's efforts in helping your child become a well adjusted human being					
ATTITUDE					
Your child's enthusiasm for school					
EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES					

	Excellent	Good	Average	Unsatisfactory	No Opinion
DISCIPLINE IN YOUR SCHOOL					
CITIZENSHIP					
Your school's efforts in promoting good citizenship					
RULES AND REGULATIONS					
in your child's school					
COMMUNICATION					
The exchange of information between school and home					
ADMINISTRATION					
How do you feel about the operation of your school?					
How do you feel about the operation of your school district?					
FACILITIES					
Your school building as a good place to learn					
The maintenance of your school building					
BUS SERVICE					
Do you use it? Yes _____ No _____					
FOOD SERVICE					
FINANCES					
The district's efforts in getting the most for your educational tax dollar					

APPENDIX B

	Individual Parent	All Parents	Public at Large	Staff
CURRICULUM NEWS				
Pilot programs and course improvements — why instituted and how they're doing.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Special courses such as health, physical education or graphics.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Explanations of everyday programs like citizenship, health, arts, language, social studies, co-op, etc.	✓	✓		
Unique enrichment recreation, intramural or community education programs at the school for students and adults.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Inservice meeting explanation. What's being planned to help kids?	✓	✓	✓	✓
Departmental information. Goals of each department. Example: What speech, visiting teachers and psychologists do.	✓	✓		✓
STUDENT ACTIVITIES				
National Merit semi-finalists and commended students.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Winners in district, area, regional, state or national contests of all sorts (art, yearbooks, debate, writing, athletics, industrial arts, band, beauty, etc.).	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student Council discussions and decisions affecting parents.		✓	✓	✓
Naming of persons to student group offices, yearbook staff, etc.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Special field trips, investigations or activities to benefit programs of study.	✓	✓	✓	

	Individual Parents	All Parents	Public at Large	Staff
Follow-up news on graduates (the pro football players, the co-ed who became a doctor, etc.).		✓	✓	
SCHOOL INFORMATION				
Policies such as attendance (annually).		✓		✓
Annual improvements to school.		✓	✓	✓
Michigan Week, National Education Week, etc., plans.		✓	✓	✓
Special assemblies, charitable drives, sales, talent shows, open houses, plays, etc.		✓	✓	✓
School historical notes such as famous teams, events.		✓	✓	✓
Accreditation information (on occasion).		✓	✓	✓
Finance information (as needed).		✓	✓	✓
Counseling programs, college nights, career information, scholarship news, financial aid, etc.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lunch information and monthly menus.		✓		
Requests for help. Examples: crossing guards, hall monitors, custodians, etc.		✓	✓	✓
Enrollment information (an annual story). Number of students (total and by grade), enrollment trends, etc.		✓	✓	✓
How to contact a teacher or principal for a conference.		✓	✓	
Graduation information (top grads, commencement plans, etc.).		✓	✓	✓
Homework, medical testing, student records, financial aid, report cards, library information.		✓	✓	
MISCELLANEOUS				
Clothing, food and other charitable drives.		✓	✓	✓
Busing information and rules (an annual story).		✓		✓
"Did You Know?" and "Would You Believe?" These are fillers. They can include statistics on the school, information on the faculty, the number of lunches served every month, etc.		✓		
Lost and found.		✓		
Request or appreciation for student, staff and parent volunteers.	✓	✓	✓	
New laws affecting schools. Examples: student records, school books.		✓		
Tips to parents who want to help their students.	✓	✓		

APPENDIX C

NEWS TIPS

MONDAY, OCTOBER 30

Jack-O'-Lantern Contest at Franklin Elementary -- Children at Ben Franklin are using everything from buttons and cloth to Mommy's wig and lipstick to decorate vegetables for the school's Halloween Contest. Contest rules state that jack-o'-lanterns must be decorated, not carved. The contest also encourages kids to use gourds and potatoes, as well as the more traditional pumpkins. Prizes will be given for the fiercest, funniest, largest and littlest jack-o'-lanterns on Monday. Any questions about Monday's contest should be directed to principal Bob Calvert, at 696-7281.

Franklin, 5206 Franklin Street; Bob Calvert, principal; 696-7281

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 31

Costumed Kids Participate in Serpentine at Hazel Dell Elementary -- Paul Bunyan may have to leave his plastic axe behind and Betsy Ross will have to put down her needle in order to join the kindergarten-through-sixth-grade serpentine on Halloween day. Teacher Bob Waterman, dressed in top hat and tails, will lead the 9 a.m. serpentine. The procession will stop at each classroom to pick up youngsters as it winds its way down the hall. With its long central hallway, Hazel Dell is the perfect place for such a serpentine; and the children's costumes and obvious excitement should make for some neat photographs. For more information please contact Jane Doyle, media specialist, at 696-7235.

Hazel Dell, 511 N.E. Anderson Road; Elizabeth Anderson, principal; 696-7235

Halloween Carols and Costumes at Minnehaha Elementary -- The tunes sound familiar, but the words are very different. Visitors to Minnehaha's Halloween Assembly at 1 p.m. on Tuesday will hear children singing such lines as: "Dashing through the street, in our costumes bright and gay, to each house we go, laughing all the way." "Jingle Bells" in October is "Pumpkin Bells." "Silver Bells" has become "Shivery Yells." And, children are singing about the "Great Pumpkin," not Santa Claus, coming to town. Not only will the singing of Halloween carols be a special part of the October 31 assembly, but the youngsters will also participate in a Halloween Parade across the stage. For more details, contact principal Dick Johnson -- 696-7145.

Minnehaha, 2800 N.E. 54th Street; Dick Johnson, principal; 696-7145

Judy Dela Vega
Public Information Specialist

Vancouver School District No. 37 is an Equal Opportunity District

The main business of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), formed in 1935, is to help bring about better citizen understanding of the objectives, accomplishments, and needs of schools. NSPRA's mission is to build support for education through responsible public relations and communication.

If the duties of your position call for communicating with the public or others in the field of education, NSPRA membership is a must for you. NSPRA member services include: *PARAGRAPHS* (member newsletter), Public Relations Resource Center, Research Assistance, PR Hotline Counseling Service, Personnel Clearinghouse, National Representation, reduced rates for members at NSPRA's annual National Seminar and a voluntary accreditation program. There are four categories of NSPRA membership: institutional, professional, associate, and student.

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To order additional titles of "*Basic School PR Guides,*" or to obtain information about NSPRA membership, products and services, contact: National School Public Relations Association, 1801 North Moore Street, Arlington, Virginia 22209, (703) 528-5840.